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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, May 19, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "STRAWBERRIES" - Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today I'm bringing you some news and previews from the Department of Agriculture about strawberries--strawberries of the present and strawberries of the future. And I've a tip or two from the grading experts--on how to select good strawberries on the market.

But just to round out the picture a bit, first I'd like to mention the strawberry of the past. For

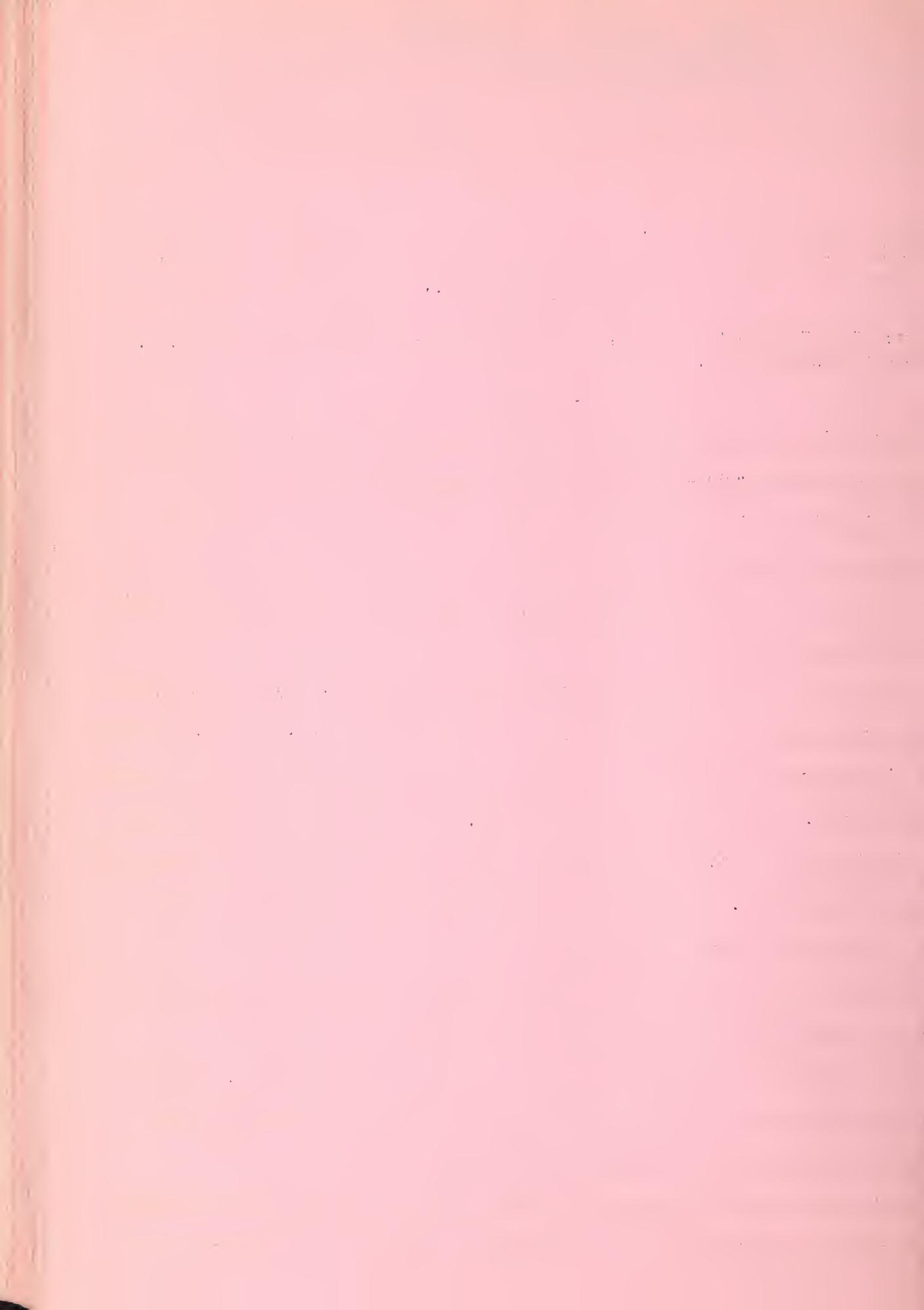
"As history books count time, it's been but recently that everyone could have a taste-acquaintance with strawberries. In the early 1800's, very few meal-planners listed 'strawberries for dinner'. For the only ones there were grew wild in out-of-the-way patches. The season for them was short. And the supply of them was scant.

"Seeing this unsatisfactory state of affairs, plant breeders took it upon themselves to do something. One evidence of their success is the carloads and truck-loads of strawberries that now come to market every year."

But--successful as the strawberry breeders have been--they still are not content. And thereon hangs my preview--about the strawberry of the future.

"Plant breeders are still in search of bigger and better berries. In test plots the country over they are experimenting with seedlings--developing berries suitable to different soil and climatic conditions."

For instance, here are some of the things that the scientists in the Department of Agriculture are doing for the strawberry grower and the strawberry eater.



Since 1920, the Bureau of Plant Industry of that department has had strawberry breeding work as part of its regular program of research. In that time they've developed the Blakemore--considered the best strawberry for preserving that's grown in the United States. Another of their developments is Redheart--grown extensively in the Northwest for canning and freezing. Two other developments are the Fairfax and Dorsett--both good berries for eating fresh.

"At present, one aim of the strawberry breeding program of that Bureau is to develop big berries--40 to a quart or even less. Another is to get into them the rare fragrance that early settlers found in the wild meadow berries along the Atlantic coast.

"According to George Darrow, strawberry breeding specialist, aroma is one of the most elusive of all qualities to breed into a berry. When he samples his experimental berries with his nose as well as his tongue he finds that many of his promising hybrids do not have aroma. And some that are fragrant on the vine lose their aroma after they're picked.

"Other characteristics that breeders the country over are trying to get into strawberries are--an even better flavor and finer color--uniformity of size--and resistance to disease. And they're working on special characteristics that will make certain berries more satisfactory for different purposes--for canning--freezing--preserving or eating fresh."

So much for my preview of tomorrow's strawberry. Now for some news and shopping suggestions for the strawberries of today--this year.

"Shortcake season this year, though it got off to a late start has so far been a good one--from the viewpoint of the strawberry eater. Supplies have been more plentiful than last year's, and prices have been low to the consumer."

As for selecting strawberries on the market, here are some tips from men who set up grades for these berries.

"Strawberries on the market rate highest when they have solid red color and a bright, clean, fresh appearance, with caps and stems of fresh green. Berries are marked down in grade if they show decay or mold, or if they are shrunken. If they've been picked before they are mature they may have white spots on them--especially on the tips.

"Overripe or mashed berries usually give the buyer fair warning--by staining the container. It is well to examine the strawberries in the bottom of the box. This may be done by simply tipping the box so that the lower layers can be seen."

For busy cooks, the strawberry is a favorite. Nearly everyone thinks it's unnecessary to give this berry any fancy treatment. Long-time favorites are the simplest dishes--such as shortcake--strawberries with cream--strawberries eaten fresh dipped in powdered sugar. They also make colorful garnishes for desserts and salads.

Strawberries should be washed only a short time before they're to be used. Rinse them gently by handfuls in a bowlful of water instead of letting the stream from the faucet fall on them. Remove the caps and stem after the berries are thoroughly washed. And don't let the berries stand in water, or they'll lose color and flavor.

And that's all the news, previews, and suggestions I have for today on strawberries past--present--or future.

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